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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BELGRADE 000750

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: CLOSURE OF ICTY

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SR](#) [ICTY](#)

SUBJECT: BETTER RHETORIC, LITTLE PROGRESS ON MLADIC HUNT

REF: A. BELGRADE 687

[1](#)B. BELGRADE 738

[1](#)C. BELGRADE-EUR/SCE EMAIL OF MAY 11

[1](#)D. BELGRADE 745

Classified By: Ambassador Michael C. Polt, reasons 1.4 (b,c,d)

[1](#)1. (c) Summary: Since the EU's May 3 decision to halt SAA talks with SaM over the government's failure to hand over Mladic to The Hague, the GoS' rhetoric against Mladic has intensified, more Mladic supporters have been detained, and police have staged more publicized raids of Mladic's family's property. The efforts show a change in tactics, and a long-overdue attempt by the government to de-glorify the fugitive. Meanwhile, a number of senior officials tell us Kostunica is committed to bringing Mladic in, but needs more time to do it. This newfound determination, even if genuine, has not yielded a result) though those in charge of the search operation tell us the increase in public pressure is helping. End summary.

RHETORIC SHIFT

[1](#)2. (u) Since the EU's May 3 lockdown on SAA negotiations with SaM, the government's tack on ICTY cooperation has changed noticeably. Following the decision, Kostunica began using - for him - much stronger language to describe Mladic as dishonorable and selfish (ref a) and has finally adopted our long-held position that new deadlines are meaningless and that Mladic needs to be turned in immediately. Other public statements by GoS officials have similarly reinforced the government's commitment to finding Mladic, though some - like that of President Tadic - were confusingly vague and uninspiring. While these statements mark a departure on tactics, and perhaps indicate a stronger effort to change hearts and minds in Serbia to effect Mladic's capture, Kostunica has still been careful not to publicly step outside the boundaries of his voluntary surrender policy.

[1](#)3. (u) The EU's decision also prompted a hastily-planned pro-Europe/anti-government rally by center-left micro-parties, led by president of the newly-formed LDP, Cedomir Jovanovic. The rally drew some 5,000 supporters, despite a short planning timeframe, little funding, and no support from local government or police, who maintained normal traffic patterns around the rally point at Republic Square instead of blocking off streets as is the norm for marches. Outspoken reformist and Agriculture Minister Dulic-Markovic, formerly of the micro-party Civic Alliance but now a G-17 Plus member, attended the rally, which was slightly larger than a similar anti-government rally organized by the Radical party in February.

PRIVATE COMMITMENTS

[1](#)4. (c) Privately, Kostunica reiterated his public comments about deadlines to the Ambassador in a meeting on May 9 (ref b). He gave few details about operational aspects of the hunt for Mladic, nor any indication that a handover was imminent. He did, though, try to lay some responsibility for the failure in the laps of USG and other intelligence services, a charge the Ambassador rejected. (Kostunica's profound displeasure with the EU's decision to stop the SAA talks shortly before the May 21 Montenegro referendum also suggests he harbors little hope of a Mladic capture before then.) MINFIN Dinkic, meanwhile, told the Ambassador in a May 10 pull-aside that he was convinced Kostunica was committed to getting Mladic, and confirmed that the PM had instructed security services to shoot if necessary to apprehend him (ref c). Echoing Tadic's public comments, Dinkic implored the international community to give Kostunica more time to bring Mladic in. Tadic told the Ambassador (ref d) in a meeting May 10 that, while he thought an arrest would be better for Serbia, Kostunica was unlikely to abandon the voluntary surrender strategy, noting that the manner in which Mladic was brought in and handed over would be critically important to Serbia.

[1](#)5. (c) In a meeting with Emboffs May 12, ICTY Cooperation Council Chairman Rasim Ljajic said Kostunica has hung "all of the government's policies" on the Mladic issue. He said the EU decision has backed Kostunica into a corner, and that the PM would do whatever was necessary to bring in Mladic, including by force if that was needed to keep the coalition afloat. He stressed, though, that Kostunica would never

publicly abandon the "voluntary surrender" policy, as an outright arrest would surely cause the Socialists to stop supporting the minority government and bring down the coalition. Ljajic said a "Lukic or Beara" scenario was most probable, whereby the government brought Mladic in by force but portrayed it to the public as a surrender. Ljajic said, though, that there is no way to predict when this might happen.

OPERATIONAL IMPACTS

16. (c) Senior sources involved in the effort to locate and apprehend Mladic, meanwhile, have noticed a positive impact on the effort from the GoS's recent shift in rhetoric. The PM's negative portrayals of Mladic, the continued arrest of alleged Mladic supporters (the most recent was announced only days ago) a former Mladic driver), and the high-profile raid on Mladic's house in the Belgrade suburb of Banovo Brdo) undertaken with an abundance of police manpower and the closing down of neighborhood streets) all have contributed to a palpable tension in the Mladic support camp, note investigators. Call-ins to a recently-established "tip-line" are up, and Mladic supporters who are being interrogated are more nervous than before. While this has not brought any fresh leads or brought the government any closer to an arrest, senior sources believe the chances for finding Mladic are better now because of the GoS's public campaign.

COMMENT

17. (c) By all accounts, the GoS, and Kostunica in particular, seem to be taking the Mladic issue more seriously. Kostunica reportedly told his ministers that finding Mladic is a "priority." The EU decision has had a real catalyzing effect on the government, turning DSS's biggest win) the start of SAA talks) into its most spectacular failure, and Kostunica seems to be feeling the heat of this. The change in rhetoric and the increase in public (even if perhaps staged) assaults on the Mladic family's personal space are not likely for the benefit of a fed-up international community. They might instead be the start of an attempt to prepare the Serbian public for Mladic's eventual transfer.

POLT